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Instructional Quality Commission

Nov 7, 2015

Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)
State Board of Education
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Commission and Board members:

We write as a diverse coalition of interfaith and civil rights leaders, as well as members of cultural and educational organizations, to urge you to adopt a more inclusive curriculum frameworks narrative that portrays the state's diverse communities in a manner that is fair, accurate, and culturally sensitive.

While we commend the Instructional Quality Commission's arduous efforts in striving for a more inclusive and balanced curriculum framework in history and social studies, there remains the unfinished task of appropriately reflecting Ancient India, Hinduism & Jainism. We strongly urge you to consider the concerns of the Hindu American community to have Hinduism, Jainism and India depicted accurately and fairly in the textbook frameworks. Not only will such efforts enrich the educational and classroom experience of California's increasingly diverse student population, but an equitable and accurate presentation of Hinduism will promote dignity and reduce the incidence of violence and bullying arising from ignorance of the faith practiced by more than half a million Californians.

In particular, we respectfully request you to consider the following specific areas of concern:

- **Origins of Ancient Indian Civilization** -- The origins of ancient Indian civilization is highly contested amongst academics and a continually evolving topic of research. There is a growing body of research which sheds light on the economic, political, European nationalist, and missionary agendas of the earliest inventors of Aryan invasion and migration theories, and how these biases shaped the foundations of Indology as a field of study. Genetic studies are also dramatically changing the understandings of the origins of Indians (and South Asians), placing ancestral Indians in the region tens of thousands of years earlier than previously hypothesized. The multiple theories about the origins of ancient Indians, as well as the different fields of study that can be involved in efforts to unravel history, should be presented rather than definitively privileging any one theory over others. Allowing students to consider the divergent theories on this topic will further promote critical thinking skills.
- **Women's Roles in History and Ancient India** -- All pre-modern societies were patriarchal, however, in the current draft of the narrative, the issue is covered only three times, of which one occurs in the context of India and Hinduism. Other historical and present-day societies have been and continue to be largely patriarchal as well, but there is no mention of them in the standards. Even in modern-day American society, patriarchy is evidenced in the gaps seen in both economic or political power, but the narrative makes no overt mention of it. In the selective coverage of patriarchy in discussions on Hindu/Indian society, there is no mention of the positive contributions of women to these civilizations/societies or the occurrences of matriarchies or matrilineality where relevant. The absence of a comprehensive approach to patriarchy as well as the positive

role of women throughout history, may be contrary to the explicit purpose of the Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content, which provides in part that, "instructional materials must also help students to understand both the historical roles and the contributions of women and minorities in other societies [and] the forces that shaped those roles and contributions..." The selective coverage of patriarchy in narrative of only certain cultures, especially in the absence of covering the issue comprehensively, may also violate the spirit of Education code sections 51501 and 60044 (see below).

- **Presentation of Caste** -- The presentation of the social and cultural practice of caste in India must not be conflated with religious teachings. It is important to distinguish between the concepts of jati (occupational group) and varna, and the development over many centuries of what is called caste. Social divisions and structures in any society are rarely static and often see rapid changes during certain periods in their history. This too must be reflected in any discussions on India. It is highly inappropriate, also, to have students draw social hierarchy pyramids of a historical system that was conceived as a holistic division of labor, or participate in any other classroom exercise conflating Hinduism with caste. Not only are such activities demonstrably inaccurate, but they can only serve to humiliate Hindu and South Asian students whose practice of Hinduism in the United States is unaffected by vestiges of caste.
- **Key Hindu and Jain Concepts** -- The accurate description of key Hindu concepts, such as Dharma, Karma, Yoga, and Moksha, as well as explaining Hindu values is critical to student's understanding of Hinduism. The Jain tradition should also be explained with clarity and detail, to ensure basic understanding of Jainism. Any oversimplification of key concepts will render them inaccurate or meaningless for students.

Finally, we urge you to:

- Ensure that the community's input is accepted to maximize accuracy and cultural sensitivity.
- Avoid violating the spirit of state Education code sections 51501 and 60044, which "prohibit the State Board of Education and local school boards from adopting content that may adversely reflect upon another group because of their race, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, handicap, or occupation." Moreover, ensure that the framework narrative is consistent with The Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content which have indicated that, "No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."
- Ensure the process is transparent and upholds the laws that provide Californians an opportunity to provide feedback prior to final passage of the frameworks.

I also represent the HAR

Thank you,



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Organization

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